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My name is Alex LaForest, I'm a resident of Manchester, CT, and I teach at Dwight-Bellizzi school in Hartford, CT. I am writing today in support of Raised Bill 948, An Act Addressing Education Funding and Racial Equity in Connecticut. As a Connecticut public school educator, I have seen firsthand the impact that funding inequity has had on my students. Since 2015 I've had the privilege of working in Windham, Manchester, now Hartford, and the funding disparity has been drastic. While working in Windham as High School teacher, I watched my ELLs be placed in classes by language acquisition opposed to content knowledge. In my freshmen remedial Algebra class I had a student from Vietnam who was on grade level with the Honors Algebra II, however due to funding to provide support and interventions, she was placed in a remedial class. This was a detriment to this student's future education.

While working in Manchester, I was able to see a school thriving in a technology bubble pre-COVID. Yes, the school had several issues in how to reach the students the best way, but that was mainly a school figuring out how to optimize the technology that they have. There's a difference in between figuring out how to use the technology the best, and make due without it. For years, teachers have been making due with what they have, but more importantly what they don't have. This is not ok. The placating praise of how teachers have persevered and made the best of what they have, needs to stop. As praise on its own, its fine, but just like when you overuse a phrase and it loses its meaning, so does the praise. This praise has become less adulation and more of an excuse for why we haven't been doing more for the educational system. Lately, we haven't been pouring into schools until we absolutely have to. And eventually putting the cart before the horse will have to stop. Our district has been working towards having enough Chromebooks for years, and it wasn't until it was absolutely necessary that we were awarded funding through grants to actually meet this need. But this now meant that we had students at home with technology that they did not know how to use. This year has not only weighed heavily on students meeting academic benchmarks, but also technological ones as well. When did a parent paying a Wifi bill become necessary for a student to attain a free public education?

That's why I believe this bill must be passed. Funding inequities across and within our schools are preventing our students--particularly English Language Learners, students of color and children from low-income families--from getting the excellent education they deserve. Connecticut students have faced unprecedented hardship over the past year, and cannot wait multiple years to attend a fully-funded school.